

THE UNITED STATES ARMY  
CHAPLAIN CENTER AND SCHOOL

Blacks  
Post Civil War

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MINISTRY OF CHAPLAINS  
ASSIGNED TO BLACK UNITS:  
1866-1920

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A Research Paper  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of Requirements for Graduation

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## FOREWORD

This paper deals with the army chaplain and his ministry to black units between 1865 and 1920. The post-Civil War establishment of black units with white officers, and the transition from all-white to black chaplains for black units, is briefly discussed. The traditional role, some special duties, and a few significant accomplishments are considered. Some problems and concerns of the chaplains, then, are compared to like problems faced by the chaplains today. Non-chaplain type duties are considered from the point of view of their own impact, and of their affect on traditional chaplain functions.

Most of the original material behind this paper comes from reports and correspondence prepared by the subjects, themselves. Research efforts in some fifteen black studies books, on the shelves of the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School, Library, produced minimal results. Little was found in the New York Public Library. Two books, Stovall's Colored Regulars and Fowler's The Black Infantry in the West, were the only sources in book form. The archives of the National Council of Churches, containing original documents of the defunct Federal Council of Churches, was very helpful for material on the World War I period.

I am greatly indebted to Chaplain Carl O. Stover for his personal guidance, access to his research files, referral to other sources, and for opening the door of the National Council of Churches Archives. Frank N. Schultz, whom I have never met, is appreciated for permitting use of parts of his unpublished work, a Dictionary of American Negro Biographies.

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## CHAPTER I

### A Historical Perspective

In 1866 Congress authorized the army to establish Regular Army units of black soldiers under white officers.<sup>1</sup> On 1 August 1866 the army ordered that a chaplain be assigned to each black regiment, with, in addition to regular duties, the responsibility of developing and conducting a program of education for black enlisted men.<sup>2</sup> This new policy of assigning chaplains to units had the effect of making black regiments the only army units in the field to have continuous chaplain coverage; a service other units enjoyed only when in the area of some permanent post.

Between the summers of 1866 and 1867 the army organized six regiments of black soldiers under white officers. In 1869 reorganization reduced the total to four regiments. The black regiments were the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. These regiments served under white officers almost exclusively throughout the period covered by this paper. In 1884 the first post-Civil War black chaplain was commissioned and assigned to the 9th Cavalry.<sup>3</sup> By the turn of the century black chaplains were in all four units. It was policy

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<sup>1</sup>Arlen L. Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West: 1869-1891 (Negro University Press, Greenwood Pub. Co., Westport, Conn., 1971), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Frank N. Schubert, Dictionary of Negro Biography, (To be published, representing excerpts from individual chaplain files in the National Archives).

to place black chaplains in black regiments. Black chaplains were not assigned to post or to white units.

Chaplains, black and white, attended their traditional duties while performing, what today would be considered, a full-time educational role. It appeared they generally put forth great effort to accomplish their many duties. They left their imprint on military educational thought and doctrine, as it is today. While attending their traditional duties, making their mark in education, and living the harsh frontier life, they also wrestled with most of the problems the chaplain (and the army) gives high priority to today.<sup>4</sup>

Black unit chaplains served on the western frontier, continuously, until the start of the Spanish-American War. During that time some of the chaplains pulled recruiting tours in the East. One of them spent several years in Washington, D.C., as head of army education.<sup>5</sup> Starting with hostilities in Cuba and continuing through World War I the black chaplains saw duty in Cuba, the Philippines, New York, Hawaii, and Europe. In foreign lands, the chaplains increased their civil action involvement. Black chaplains had such offices as Head of Sanitation for a Cuban city and Superintendent of Education for a province in the Philippines.<sup>6</sup> Wherever they were and whatever else they did, they remained chaplains.

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<sup>4</sup>William T. Anderson, Chap., 10th Cav. Regt., (AGO Doc. File No. 53910, RG No. 94, National Archives, 1897-1907).

<sup>5</sup>Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West, pp. 103-4.

<sup>6</sup>Schubert, Dictionary of Negro Biography, Notes on Chap. T. G. Steward.

## CHAPTER II

### Traditional Ministry

Beginning in 1862 the chaplain was required to submit monthly reports to the Adjutant General of the Army. Files of those submitted reports are the best, and almost the only, source for getting details about how the black unit chaplains performed their religious duties. The standard monthly report form called for information which reflected the chaplains' religious program and the response it received. Information required included meeting and Sunday School attendance (and during some periods, potential attendance), sick and stockade visitation figures, numbers of men seeking out the chaplain for counsel, and special activities. It also called for a brief historical report and for vital statistics. Space was provided for the chaplains' evaluation of their programs, for discussing problems, and making recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

The black unit chaplain, as did post chaplains, had the traditional responsibility for educating dependent children. The black unit chaplain had separate programs for children and soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

The battle against vice was energetically pursued by some black unit chaplains. Some of them may have suffered for their zeal.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>D. Elington Barr, to Adjutant General, Letter, 1 Oct. 1872.

The National Archives file for Captain William Thomas Anderson, 10th Cavalry, revealed that he had a very wide range of concern and involvement. His file, dated between 1897 and 1907, contained correspondence and monthly reports dealing with; conducting special classes for the intellectual, moral, and social improvement of non-commissioned officers;<sup>4</sup> organizing the Christain Endeavor Society for enlisted men;<sup>5</sup> providing writing material, facilities, and encouragement to the men to write home;<sup>6</sup> command support for chaplain programs;<sup>7</sup> non-commissioned officer resistance to moral improvement in the garrison;<sup>8</sup> the use of athletic programs as diversions and vice;<sup>9</sup> scrounging equipment for YMCA programs;<sup>10</sup> the dangers of "rum" and extended foreign service, to the constitutions of the men;<sup>11</sup> the effect of foreign service on poor reenlistment situation;<sup>12</sup> the poor quality of recruits;<sup>13</sup> the commendable interest shown by white officers in the welfare of black soldiers;<sup>14</sup> special barracks visits and counseling of trouble-makers to support good discipline;<sup>15</sup> cocaine and morphine--and prophetic warnings of the danger from doing nothing about the easy access of drugs to the troops--~~status~~;<sup>16</sup> of the demoralizing effect vice in a local community had on the soldier;<sup>17</sup> and the problem and frustration involved in trying to keep prostitutes off post, for the good of the men.<sup>18</sup> The chaplain of the black unit faced about what the troop chaplain faces now. He responded, often, as the chaplain does today. He had liars and bootleggers; today it is hookers and pushers. He had the YMCA; today the chaplain opens coffee houses.

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<sup>4</sup>Anderson, op. cit., (Report, 31 Dec. 1899). <sup>5</sup>Ibid., 31 Jan. 1898.  
<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1 May 1901. <sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1 June 1901. <sup>8</sup>Ibid., 1 May 1901.  
<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 31 Oct. 1901. <sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1 Mar. 1902. <sup>11</sup>Ibid. <sup>12</sup>Ibid. <sup>13</sup>Ibid.  
<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 1 May 1901. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., 31 Oct. 1902. <sup>16</sup>Ibid., 1 Mar. 1903.  
<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 1 Oct. 1902. <sup>18</sup>Ibid., 1 Aug. 1904.

## CHAPTER III

### Social Ministry

The responsibility for developing and conducting a program of education for the black soldier became a major duty for the black unit chaplain. The task of educating the black soldier was a heavy responsibility and, at the same time, a many-fold opportunity for the unit chaplain. Early in the period of time covered by this report, discouraging reviews were written about this area of responsibility. Seldom did the chaplains make negative remarks about other duties. In educating the black soldier, they also made their most positive comments. Here, too, they made their most enduring impression on the military.<sup>1</sup> In effect, this small group of chaplains was made responsible for a large part of the socializing process of a segment of black America.

Chaplains John N. Schultz and D. Elington Barr were two of the first white chaplains assigned to post-Civil War black regiments. Schultz, serving with the 24th Infantry Regiment, was conducting school for the black soldier as early as 1869.<sup>2</sup> Barr, 25th Infantry Regiment, was very energetic in the education program. While the regiment was still forming, he started teaching the soldiers. He held classes at night, in his own quarters, for men who could not

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<sup>1</sup>Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West, pp. 106-108.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.



attend school during the day. When deployed to the Texas frontier, he carried the program forward; not letting the difficult circumstances dampen his spirit. Barr's efforts ceased in 1872 when he was forced to resign. On learning of Barr's forced resignation, the Department of Education of the State of Texas gave him a letter of appreciation for his work in public education.<sup>3</sup>

In 1875 a newly commissioned white chaplain arrived at Fort Davis, Texas, who was to make such a contribution to the education of the soldier that he would, in just six years, become the Chief of Education for the army. This new chaplain, George Gatewood Mullins, became one of the leading pioneers of military education.<sup>4</sup> On the frontier and in Washington he worked for, and succeeded, at getting standardized textbooks and subject-matter in post schools, financial support, non-chaplain teaching staff for unit and post programs, and mandatory schooling for all men having less than an elementary school education level.<sup>5</sup>

Chaplain Mullin's success came hard. He began service on the frontier with misgivings about the prospects of teaching black soldiers. His misgivings were increased when he saw the conditions under which he would teach. The unit had been three years without a chaplain. He had to start every program from nothing. He expressed doubts about his prospective students, half of which had no education--as measured by teachers--and half who had less than fourth grade reading ability.<sup>6</sup> His devotion must have won out. In the same year he arrived,

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 94, 103.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

an inspector said of his efforts, "I have no hesitation in saying that Chaplain Mullins is one of the most energetic, reasonable and serviceable of his profession in the army, that I have met in my inspections."<sup>7</sup> Chaplain Mullins reported a correlation between educational activity and good discipline. He began to push education as a viable means of obtaining better soldiers.<sup>8</sup> He started articulating ideas that were to help make him the leading advocate of the social value of education in the army. He indicated something of the source of his motivation when he wrote:

The ambition to be all that soldiers should be is not confined to a few sons of an unfortunate race. They are possessed of the notion that the colored people of the whole country are more or less affected by their conduct in the army. The chaplain is sometimes touched by evidence of their manly anxiety to be well thought of at Army HQ and throughout the states. This is the bottom secret of their patient toil, and surprising progress in the effort to get at least an elementary education.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps, it was insight into the character of the black soldier that inspired a white chaplain to great accomplishments and recognition in the field of army education.

In 1886 Chaplain Allen Allensworth, a black chaplain, joined the 24th Infantry. He was an ex-slave. He overcame considerable opposition to get his commission. For a year and a half he continued the educational program he found when he joined the unit. Then, the unit moved to Arizona. There, Allensworth developed his own program. His education insight may have been ahead of his contemporaries; for he prepared in advance for army innovations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 95-6.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

seeing a need for a graded curriculum, Allensworth developed one. He worked out a successful study outline for both children and soldiers, and published his ideas in a booklet, titled, "Outline of Course of Study, and Rules Governing Post Schools of Ft. Bayard, N.H." He advocated visual aids in teaching, and frequently purchased commercial aids from personal funds.<sup>11</sup> In recognition of his ideas, the National Education Association invited him to speak at the annual (1891) meeting in Toronto, Canada. On being refused governmental support for the invitation, he took leave and delivered the speech, titled, "Education in the United States Army."<sup>12</sup> Chaplain Allensworth was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel at retirement, making him the senior army chaplain.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps, the biggest reason for the black unit's success in the field of education was found in the hungering spirits of their pupils, the black enlisted man.

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<sup>11</sup>Itid, p. 106, (ref. Report of Inspection, 1890, Record Group 159, National Archives).

<sup>12</sup>Itid, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup>Schubert, Dictionary of American Negro Biography, Notes on W. T. Allensworth.

## CHAPTER IV

### Other Duties

Besides ministering to the troops and dependents, the black unit chaplains provided religious and educational assistance to civilians. One chaplain served as Superintendent of Education for the province of Luzon, the Philippines, and another was head of the Sanitation Department of a city in Cuba.<sup>1</sup> Black chaplains frequently did recruiting duty in the East.<sup>2</sup> One poor chaplain became Post Commander and Quartermaster Officer when his regiment shipped out for Cuba.<sup>3</sup> During World War I a black chaplain, Lieutenant Arrington S. Helm, reported that he had "been in full command of my company, during the absence of my captain at a school for specialists, near since the first weeks of my stay in France. I led them to the trenches."<sup>4</sup>

The chaplains' other duties were many, some were very trying and time-costly. The records indicate the chaplain accomplished his primary job, religious ministry to the troops. He became loved, or learned to love, the black soldier, whom he served.

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<sup>1</sup>Schubert, Dictionary of American Negro Biography, Notes on T. G. Steward and W. T. Allenworth.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Anderson, op. cit., Letter to Mrs. O. Frank General, 10 May 1898.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Dyson, Howard University: The College of Education (Howard University Press, Washington, D.C., 1941), p. 11.

## CHAPTER V

### Special Interests

The black unit chaplains, particularly the black chaplains, dealt with race relations problems. The chaplains seldom mentioned race in their reports and correspondence. Black chaplains seemed aware of the precariousness of their position due to white racial attitudes. Their efforts toward gaining a degree of racial equality were generally aimed at enhancing the image and self respect of the black soldier. They expressed awareness of the reality of the situation, and reassured others that they would not use the chaplaincy to get direct change.

Chaplain Allen Allensworth assured the Adjutant General, in a letter intended to help him get commissioned as a chaplain, that he intended to "guard against allowing myself in any position to give offense."<sup>1</sup> Later, in the Philippines, he directly confronted the paradox of black soldiers being treated as second-class citizens in the states while fighting and dying for independence in a foreign land.<sup>2</sup>

Theophilus Gould Steward was the black chaplain who most directly faced the race problem. He probably did more than any other to raise the image and pride of the black soldier. His weapon was the pen. The goal of his writing

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<sup>1</sup>Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Schubert, Dictionary of American Negro Biography, Notes on W. T. Allensworth.

was to bring out the greatness of service rendered America by the black people, and to put the black soldier to the fore by publicizing his achievements, and to help the black people realize the value of valiant military service in their struggle for dignity and acceptance. Steward's writings included scholarly papers, a victorian novel, and a book of military history. The army assigned him light duty so he could author the book, Colored Regulars.<sup>3</sup>

Steward underscored the value of military service to the black people in his novel, Swords Precede Plowshares, when he wrote, "Only the reality of blacks as victorious soldiers led whites to shed their disdain for black men."<sup>4</sup> He advocated using black ex-soldiers to teach drill and military tactics in all Negro schools because, he wrote, "Soft men cannot carry the hard fight."<sup>5</sup> A New York weekly once critized Steward for bothering himself with hunting for watermelons for the men instead of being at the cemetery providing proper burial services for soldiers lost to tropical fevers.<sup>6</sup> While he was scrounging melons at the time, he denied neglecting the troops, living or dead.

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<sup>3</sup>Theophilus G. Steward, Colored Regulars in the U. S. Army (Arno Press and New York Times, 1904).

<sup>4</sup>Schubert, Dictionary of American Negro Biography, Notes on T. G. Steward.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Leslie Weekly (New York), 22 Sept. 1898, Montauk Point article.

## CHAPTER VI

### All For Nothing?

With a fairly stable force of black soldiers in four regiments, the chaplains were able to make some recognizable impressions. However, with mobilization for world war, came black soldiers and new black units in such great number that past accomplishments appeared insignificant at the time. The chaplains and the educational facilities of the Army were tasked far beyond their capabilities.

Recruitment of additional black soldiers was hampered by educational requirements that most black clergy could not meet. Thus, hundreds-of-thousands of black soldiers went to war without the benefits that black unit chaplains had strived to bring the soldier.

The Federal Council Of Churches, through its Committee on Negro Churches and the Committee on the Welfare of Negro Troops, lobbied the War Department for black chaplain recruitment sufficient to represent the black troop level.<sup>1</sup> The Committee on the Welfare of Negro Troops asked that it be the body to determine which black clergy be accepted for the chaplaincy.<sup>2</sup> Lobbying and

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<sup>1</sup>National Council of Churches. (Archive records, partially indexed, of the Federal Council of Churches, 10 Oct. 1917). Minutes of the Comm. on the Welfare of Negro Troops.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

reports on inspection tours by committee members started to show results. They were too slow. The war ended with sixty black chaplains on active duty.<sup>3</sup> Many others were on active duty and training to become chaplains in black units. When the war ended, they were released from active duty without ever serving as chaplains.

The route of being chaplain to black units was a dead-end for many of the chaplains, black and white. At least two of the first group of white chaplains were forced to resign. The first black chaplain of the group was forced out, even though there was strong evidence he was ill rather than drunk, as charged.<sup>4</sup> Still, the group of black unit chaplains made a place for themselves in history, and they did a great service for the black soldier and for their country.

Little, in comparison to their deeds, has been written about the black soldiers or their chaplains. Without recourse to the writings and records left by these few chaplains, the gap between what was done and what was popularized by white historians would be much broader.

After all the black unit chaplains did for their men, perhaps, they are doing something greater today; in helping a great people realize their newly blossoming dignity is rightfully theirs.

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<sup>3</sup> Emmett J. Scott, American Negro in the World War (Publisher not shown, 1919), p. 482.

<sup>4</sup> D. E. Barr, Chap, 25th Inf. Regt., (25th, BG 94, NA, 1872).



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